

7 Easy Ways to Wake Up with Less Pain

Try these stretches, bed set ups, and sleep positions to ensure you wake up energized -- not stiff and sore

Wouldn't it be nice to jump out of bed full of energy, ready to tackle the day ache-free? If that's more dream world than reality for you, you're not alone. For a lot of us, waking up feeling amazing can seem out of reach, especially if we're hitting the gym hard during the day or dealing with chronic pain.

While we may never literally leap from under our duvet, there are steps we can take to feel less sore in the a.m. -- and even get a better night's sleep as well. Check out these tips from fitness and sleep experts and add them to your nightly routine now.

CREATE THE PERFECT SET UP

Sure, some people have no problem falling asleep in full daylight or with a crowd of people around them, but most of us need optimal conditions for a restful eight hours. Sleep to Live Institute director Robert Oexman, DC, lays out exactly what we should aim for:

- Make sure your bedroom is completely dark. Install blackout curtains if you can or invest in a sleep mask. Also, make sure you get rid of any nightlights or overly bright alarm clocks. Oexman says any extra light in the room "can inhibit melatonin production, which we need to fall asleep and stay asleep."
- Try to keep your bedroom a cool 65 to 68 degrees. If the room is too hot, you could toss and turn all night.
- Keep it quiet in your room. If you can't get rid of street traffic sounds or your neighbor's Metallica tribute band practice, Oexman suggests investing in a white noise machine. "Don't use the other settings -- rainforests and waterfalls may put you to sleep, but alterations in the recorded track will eventually wake you back up." He also adds that you can download white noise apps on your smart phone.
- Get your own blankets. "One of the biggest causes of partner disturbance is stolen covers," Oexman says. He suggests using one fitted sheet, but having separate flat sheets and blankets for each person. "Simply cover it with a duvet and no one will see the difference," he says.

PREP FOR SLEEP

You've got the set up, but there are still ways you can sabotage a restful night. Sleep expert Isaac Eliaz, MD, says to avoid eating two hours before bed, "as the effort it takes to digest food during the night can detract from a restful sleep." Also, he suggests turning off your electronics (computer, cell phone, even the TV) at least an hour before bed so you can more easily relax.

If you're still keyed up, or just don't know what to do with an hour free from technology, Tara Zimliki, certified personal trainer and founder of Tara's Boot Camp, suggests a bath. "This should alleviate some of your aches and pains in the morning and help to give you more energy for the day."

YOUR PRE-BED ROUTINE

You've got your dream bedroom, you're steering clear of your iPhone, and hopping into a bath instead. An easy stretching routine can also really help you relax (physically and mentally) and minimize any aches and pains the next morning. Kristie DiScipio, fitness manager at Equinox Fitness, recommends doing each of these about 5 to 15 minutes before bed, then hopping right under the covers to relax.

First, Eliaz says if you only do one nighttime stretch, make it Downward Facing Dog. He says it's one of the most effective, "because it stretches the legs, arms, back, and neck, and allows for better circulatory flow throughout the body."

To try it, start on your hands and knees on the floor, with your knees directly below your hips and your hands slightly in front of your shoulders. Then exhale and lift your knees up and away from the floor. At first you can have your knees bent and your heels lifted. Hold that for a couple breaths, then exhale and push your knees straight and stretch your heels toward the floor. You're basically making an upside down "V" with your body.

HAPPY BABY POSE

Sure, it looks a little silly, but DiScipio recommends this pose since it "calms the nervous system and opens your hips."

To do it, lie on your back, exhale and bend your knees into your body. Then inhale and grab the outsides of your feet with your hands. Open your knees wide and bring them up toward your armpits. Flex your feet and push them up, parallel with your knees, and push down with your hands for resistance.

TOE TOUCHES

In addition to Downward Facing Dog, Zimliki recommends toe touches before bed to stretch your hamstrings. It's as simple as it sounds, just stand up and reach down to touch your toes (or as close as you can get). Just make sure to keep your knees slightly bent, especially if you have lower back pain. Or if it's easier you can do one leg at a time.

COBRA STRETCH

This stretch is great for your lower back, Zimliki says. "To perform this stretch, lie on your stomach and straighten out your arms, pushing your upper body towards the sky." He also suggests finishing with some shoulder rolls to loosen your upper body as well.

IF YOU'RE STILL FEELING PAIN

If you're stretching regularly and getting a restful night sleep but still waking up with chronic pain, it could be time to see a doctor. It might be something as simple as not moving enough during the day, DiScipio says, as we can feel just as sore from *inactivity* as we can from a tough workout. Or it could be a sign of something more serious, like fibromyalgia or rheumatoid arthritis, says Zimliki. Another common culprit is poor circulation, says Eliaz, so talk to your doctor if you're concerned.